

13 FEB 1972

Approved For Release 2004/11/01 : CIA-RDP88-01365R000300130002-1

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# Should All of Vietnam Be Divided in 3 Parts?

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Special to The Star

A Vietnamese philosophy professor suggests that "... a peace settlement might provide for the division of Vietnam into three parts: a Communist north, a free south and a coalition center. The people throughout Vietnam would be given an appropriate period to move to the area governed by the regime of their choice."

This "Vietnamese solution" to the war in Vietnam was put forward in a 1968 article in Foreign Affairs magazine by Maj. Gen. Edward G. Lansdale, formerly the senior liaison officer in the American Embassy in Saigon. Lansdale wrote that this kind of settlement "would permit the Vietnamese 'to vote with their feet.'"

During the past year, a group of Vietnamese exiles in Paris has begun an attempt to implement this solution. Their plan is to partition the country into its historically separate sections—Tonkin in the north, Annam in the center and Cochinchina in the south.

"We would not use these names, however," a leader of the group, who wished to remain anonymous, said. "They were imposed on Vietnam by Chinese and French colonialists. We prefer simply North, Central and South Vietnam. And Central Vietnam would be no 'coalition center.' Those who wish communism would be free to move to the North. That is the whole point of the division."

Instead, the central zone—Annam—would be "coexisting," a neutral area with diplomatic ties everywhere but aligned with neither East nor West.

Although partitioning Vietnam into the three areas is not the solution he once hoped for, Lansdale now feels that such a settlement is worth considering.

"The way things are," he said, "partitioning Vietnam may be the only way to prevent a bloodbath if the North should take over."

## The Only Hope

Since most advocates of partition expect to be the future victims of that bloodbath, they made plans soon after U.S. troop withdrawals began. Assuming that this year's U.S. Election Day is, in effect, North Vietnam's date certain

when U.S. troops will be gone from South Vietnam, these men and women decided that partition was the only hope for a free Vietnam.

The group has received broad support from anti-Thieu Vietnamese as well as private assurances from French and American officials. There is "ample reason," according to sources, to believe that Hanoi would agree to the partition plan as well.

"North Vietnam and the National Liberation Front stated years ago that 'coexistence' with a non-Communist South Vietnam is possible," a member of the group said, "so long as neither Thieu nor Ky led the Saigon government. They even named four or five prominent anti-Communist nationalists who would be 'acceptable' to them."

He said that there are many reasons for Hanoi's agreement. North Vietnam has been drained of manpower and resources by seven years of intensive war. Increasingly, the country has become dependent on China for civilian as well as military needs.

Yet China's failure to help West Pakistan during its recent war with India has persuaded many leaders in Hanoi that the big brother to the north may not be the most reliable of allies in a showdown. Moreover, the imminent visit of President Nixon to Peking and the apparent detente have given birth to fears of a sellout.

As far as the Saigon government is concerned, central Vietnam has been so devastated by the war that it will be an economic liability for years. Aside from this financial drain, the region traditionally has been a political thorn in Saigon's sensitive skin.

## Ethnic Divisions

After the Buddhist uprisings in Da Nang and Hue in 1966, Saigon's tearoom strategists joked that the ideal "Vietnamese solution" would be to give Hanoi the five central provinces and "be rid of two plagues at once."

From the American point of view, partition would allow "withdrawal with honor." The commitment to support the Thieu government would be upheld while U.S. forces could return home, the job completed.

Most important, partition would bring an end to the killing and peace to the people—north and south—after 25 years of war.

To the Vietnamese people, supporters of the plan say, partition would merely mean establishing political boundaries marking ancient cultural and ethnic divisions.

Although Vietnam covers an area only the size of New Mexico, its varied topography ranges from fertile, flat river deltas to the rocky Annamite mountains that snake down the center of the country.

Although the language is the same, pronunciation varies considerably from north to south. Vietnamese from the north do not trust southerners; southerners distrust northerners; Vietnamese from Central Vietnam trust only each other.

Central Vietnamese consider themselves the elite—handsomer and intellectually superior. Delta farmers are stereotyped as lazy, easygoing and fond of luxuries. Northerners, on the other hand, are thought to be energetic, shrewd and "tricky."

Montagnards—Vietnam's second-class mountaineers—are despised by all as dark-skinned aborigines.

While these regional differences are ridiculed as insignificant by Americans in Vietnam, the Vietnamese themselves strongly believe that they exist. Thus, advocates of partition think that the people would welcome new political borders that reflect social and cultural distinctions.

These borders are already tentatively fixed.

Lansdale felt that the size of the "coalition center" would depend on the number of people who chose to live there. The Vietnamese partition group, however, has definite boundaries in mind.

"We hope to gain territory from both the north and the south," one spokesman explained. "We wish to include not only the demilitarized zone, but land up to the 18th parallel. This would give us Quang Binh province and the city of Dong Hoi—now under Communist control."

"From the south," he continued, "we would have the five northern provinces—Quang Tri, Thau Thien, Quang Nam, Quang Tin and Quang Ngai. We also hope to gain some of the land that is now part of II Corps—Kontum, Binh Dinh